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**Samantha**

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Dear Permission to be Powerful Reader,

This is your permission slip.

To block, unfollow, delete, walk away, ghost, vanish...

Whatever you need to do. You do not need to explain. You do not need to justify. You only need to protect your peace.

Let me start with a story.

There's this girl. She's well-liked in the dance scene. Sweet reputation, soft face, poised demeanor.

But the one time I danced with her?

It felt like punishment.

She was cold. Distant. Hostile even. I didn't know what I had done—only that I was being made to feel like something dirty. Like I'd stepped into her space without permission, and now I was being silently shamed for existing.

That was a year ago.

And I've thought about that dance a lot since. I remember the shame I felt—this quiet, internal scramble of “*What did I do wrong?*”

But looking back now, the better question is:

Why the fuck did I accept that treatment for three whole minutes?

Let me be clear:

The dance floor is sacred.

You don't bring that kind of venom to a space meant for joy.

You don't get to humiliate someone in silence and think that's okay.

You don't get to dehumanize me and stay on my friend list.

So I removed her. Not out of pettiness. Out of self-respect.

And I've made it a policy since:

If you ignore my message, you're gone.

If you talk down to me, you're gone.

If you guilt, gaslight, manipulate—you're gone.

I do not keep people who devalue me.

It doesn't matter if you're cute. Or "nice." Or connected. It doesn't matter if you're family.

I've spent too much of my life being treated like I was invisible. Not anymore.

I used to struggle with guilt. That was my kryptonite. I'd let people walk all over me if they could just make me feel bad about saying no. I had to meet my "final boss" just to get free. It was psychological warfare.

But it also woke me up.

Now? You disrespect me once, I step back. You violate my boundaries, you get downgraded.

Phone calls become texts.

Texts become email.

Email becomes nothing.

You earn access to my energy, and once you show me you can't hold it with care, I take it back.

I don't do appeasement anymore.

I don't do nice guy.

I don't sacrifice myself to keep the peace.

You don't get to treat me like I don't matter and still stay in my life.

This is not cruelty. This is clarity.

Your mind is a vessel. You can train it like an athlete. Get clear on your values. On what you will and will not tolerate. And then enforce those boundaries like your life depends on it.

Because it does.

You think people change.

That they might.

That they should.

That if you just say the right thing, or hold out long enough...

They'll finally hear you.

They won't.

Change isn't something you can demand.

People don't grow — they calcify.

They don't evolve — they fossilize.

And if they were unkind? Unreliable? Self-absorbed?

Give them 10 years and they'll be even more so.

I used to wait around, hoping certain people in my life would evolve.

I thought if I gave enough chances, explained it the right way, stayed calm, held on a little longer — they'd wake up and realize how badly they were hurting me.

Instead, I stayed in relationships years past their expiration date. I held on to dead weight and called it loyalty.

But here's the truth:

You don't stick around waiting for people to change. You walk away when they don't.

The alternative? You get eaten alive.

Let's say someone in your life always crosses a line — some comment, some behavior, some habit that grinds you down every time. And you think, "Next time I'll speak up. Next time they'll change."

But when you finally do say something, they double down. Or deny it. Or blame you.

That's the moment you realize:

It was never going to change.

And the sickest part? You feel *ashamed* for hoping. For being naive enough to believe they were capable of growth.

Don't waste your life on that kind of disappointment.

If you find out that your husband is cheating on you.

He won't change.

Stop hoping for that, he abandoned you a long time ago.

You're caught up with what'll he think, and what'll she think...

And what will my parents think.

But if you knew dead to rights they would never change...

What now?

How does that change the calculus?

For me, it broke the spell that kept me enmeshed with toxic people. You're my family, but you don't own me.

You don't just get to keep taking up space in my life if you insist on being a low-life.

People out here claiming to love you...

Yet they show you the same compassion as a thug in a dark alley?

WTF is that all about?

There's such a thing as being surrounded by the wrong people. Every single person in your life could be draining you. That's rare — but it happens. It happened to me.

And I'll tell you something I wish someone told me sooner: The alternative to being treated like dirt isn't loneliness. It's peace.

I've spent long stretches of my life in isolation. And what made it bearable was that I *like* myself. I like the way I treat me. I cook for me. I write for me. I show up for me. That's more than most people ever did.

And then there's blood.

Not all poison comes in black hats. Some of it comes in the form of people you're "supposed" to love.

You know the story of the scorpion and the frog. The scorpion asks for a ride across the river. The frog hesitates—he doesn't want to be stung. The scorpion promises not to. Halfway across, he stings anyway. And as they both begin to sink, the frog cries out, "Why?" And the scorpion says, "Because it's in my nature."

That was my father.
Still is.

Even when he *wants* to do better, he can't. He's too broken. Too calcified. It's not a phase. It's not a bad mood. It's who he is. I spent my entire childhood hoping, bargaining, contorting—just to get a decent parent to show up. He never did. Not once. My earliest memories of him are violent. That's how deep the abuse runs.

To this day, he haunts me. I see him clearly now, like something unmasked. He's not a misunderstood man. He's a man who never should've had a family. No one in my family should be speaking to him. He should be left on an island, a cautionary tale for what happens when someone is left unchecked for too long.

And guess what? That's why my sister lost her mind. People don't understand that if you live with crazy long enough, it seeps in. It breaks something. It rewires your nervous system. And then *you* become the one who can't sleep. *You* become the one crying in the middle of the day for no reason. *You* carry their madness like it's your own.

That's what happens when you refuse to cut out the wrong people.
You don't stay safe.
You don't stay sane.
You drown with them.

And sometimes, you don't even realize how deep under you are until you finally surface — gasping for breath, wondering why you ever swam out that far to begin with.

Just the other day I was at the Zen Center. One of our members brought her husband with her — I hadn't seen him in over a year. So I asked,

"Where you been, man?"

I figured maybe he'd just been busy with work, or maybe Zen wasn't really his thing. That happens — some spouses come to be supportive, but you can tell it's not really for them. And that's fine. They're still kind. Respectful. They get it.

But this guy? He was salty. Bitter. Resentful in a way I'd never seen at the Zen Center. I was stunned. The air around him felt charged — like he resented being there, resented *her*, resented all of it. And I thought: *Why are you even here if you hate it this much?*

It was obvious. These two shouldn't be together. I was watching a slow-motion collapse. That marriage is on its last legs. Not because they don't have overlapping interests. But because he can't even *tolerate* her joy. Can't sit through her peace without squirming. And you can't build a relationship on that. You can't even have decent sex on that kind of resentment.

And it hit me: most people don't realize how toxic their relationships are — until it's too late. They normalize tension. They cling to hope. They convince themselves it'll get better. But if they knew — *really* knew — how damaging it was, they'd walk away.

And half the time, they don't leave because they think they can't do better.

But sometimes, the person you're holding on to the tightest is the one holding you back the most.

That's not love. That's fear disguised as loyalty.

Cut them loose.

Until next time,

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink. The signature reads "Anton Vanev". The first name "Anton" is written in a cursive script, and the last name "Vanev" is written in a more bold, cursive style. There are several long, sweeping lines that cross through the signature, giving it a dynamic and artistic feel.

Dancer, Writer, Buddhist.



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